

A BRIEF HISTORY GUIDE OF

Fort Macon



Fort Macon State Park

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www.ncparks.gov

Friends of Fort Macon Website:

www.friendsoffortmacon.org

Fort Hours

9:00 a.m. – 5:30 p.m. daily
Closed Christmas Day.



Please visit the North Carolina State Parks website or contact the park office for the most current information about seasonal hours, activities, alerts, camping fees, programs, rules and weather.



N.C. Division of Parks and Recreation

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1615 Mail Service Center
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A NEED FOR COASTAL DEFENSE

The danger of naval attack along the North Carolina coast seems remote today, but during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the region around Beaufort was extremely vulnerable to attack. Blackbeard and other pirates passed through Beaufort Inlet at will, and successive wars with Spain, France and Great Britain during the Colonial Period provided a constant threat of coastal raids by enemy warships. Indeed, Beaufort was captured and plundered by the Spanish in 1747 and again by the British in 1782.

North Carolina leaders recognized the need for coastal defenses to prevent future attacks and began efforts to construct forts. The eastern point of Bogue Banks was determined to be the best location from which a fort might guard the entrance to Beaufort Inlet. In 1756, construction began there on a small fascine fort known as Fort Dobbs. Fort Dobbs was never finished, and the inlet remained undefended during the American Revolution.

Early in the 1800s, continued strained relations with Great Britain led the U.S. government to build a national defense chain of coastal forts for protection. As a part of this defense, a small masonry fort, named Fort Hampton after a North Carolina Revolutionary War hero, was built to guard Beaufort Inlet during 1808-09. This fort guarded the inlet during the subsequent War of 1812 but was abandoned shortly after the end of the war. Shore erosion and a hurricane in 1825 were responsible for sweeping Fort Hampton into Beaufort Inlet by 1826.

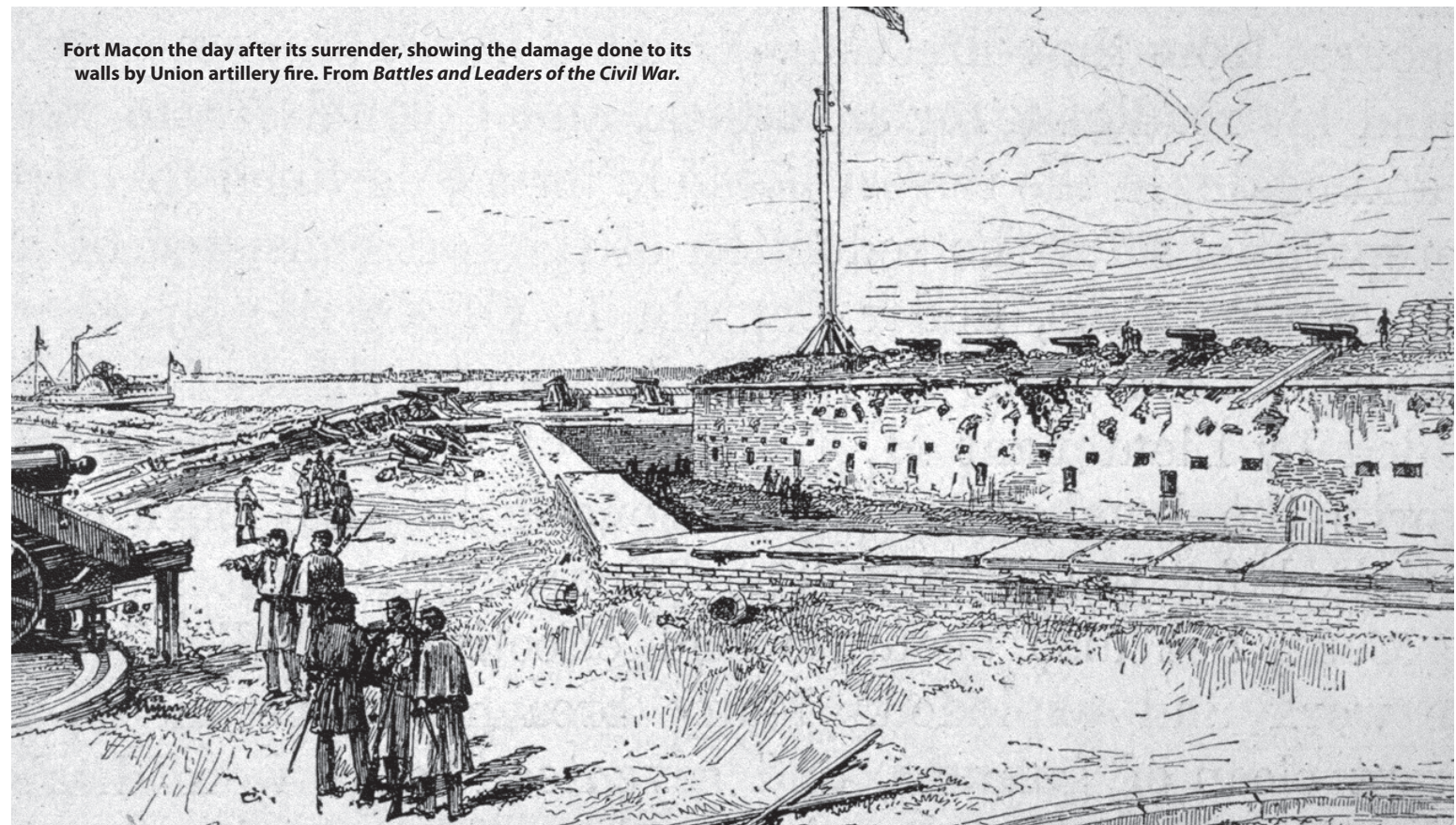
The War of 1812 demonstrated the weaknesses of existing coastal defenses and prompted the U.S. government to begin construction on an improved chain of coastal fortifications for national defense. This ambitious undertaking involved the construction of 38 new, permanent coastal forts known as the Third System. The forts were built between 1817 and 1865. Fort Macon was part of this system. Fort Macon guarded Beaufort Inlet and Beaufort Harbor, North Carolina's only major deep-water ocean port.

Fort Macon was designed by Brig. Gen. Simon Bernard and built by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. It was named after North Carolina's eminent statesman of the period, Nathaniel Macon. Construction began in 1826 and lasted for eight years. The fort was completed in December 1834 and was improved with modifications during 1841-46. The total cost of the fort was \$463,790. As a result of congressional economizing, the fort was actively garrisoned only from 1834-36, 1842-44 and 1848-49. Often, an ordnance sergeant acting as a caretaker was the only person stationed by the Army at the fort.



Surrender of Fort Macon, April 26, 1862. From Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, May 24, 1862.

Fort Macon the day after its surrender, showing the damage done to its walls by Union artillery fire. From Battles and Leaders of the Civil War.



CIVIL WAR

The Civil War began on April 12, 1861, and only two days elapsed before local North Carolina militia forces from Beaufort arrived to seize the fort for the state of North Carolina and the Confederacy. North Carolina Confederate forces occupied the fort for a year, preparing it for battle and arming it with 54 heavy cannons.

Early in 1862, Union forces commanded by Maj. Gen. Ambrose E. Burnside swept through eastern North Carolina and part of Burnside's command under Brig. Gen. John G. Parke was sent to capture Fort Macon. Parke's men captured Morehead City and Beaufort without resistance, then landed on Bogue Banks during March and April to operate against Fort Macon.

Col. Moses J. White and 400 North Carolina Confederates in the fort refused to surrender even though the fort was hopelessly surrounded. On April 25, 1862, Parke's Union forces bombarded the fort with heavy siege guns for 11 hours, aided by the fire of four Union navy gunboats in the ocean offshore and by floating batteries in the sound to the east. While the fort easily repulsed the Union gunboat attack, the Union land batteries, utilizing new rifled cannons, hit the fort 560 times. There was such extensive damage that White was forced to surrender the following morning, April 26. The fort's Confederate garrison was then paroled as prisoners of war. This battle was the second time in history that new rifled cannons had been used against a fort and demonstrated the obsolescence of fortifications such as Fort Macon as a way of defense.

The Union Army held Fort Macon for the remainder of the war, while Beaufort Harbor served as an important coaling and repair station for the Union navy.

During the Reconstruction, the U.S. Army actively occupied Fort Macon until 1877. For about 11 years during this period, since there were no state or federal penitentiaries in the military district of North and South Carolina, Fort Macon was used as a civil and military prison until 1876.

THE SECOND STATE PARK

Fort Macon was deactivated after 1877, only to be regarrisoned by state troops during the summer of 1898 for the Spanish-American War. Finally, in 1903, the U.S. Army completely abandoned the fort. The fort was not even used during World War I, and in 1923, it was offered for sale as surplus military property. However, at the bidding of North Carolina leaders, a congressional act on June 4, 1924 gave the fort and surrounding reservation to the state of North Carolina to be used as a public park. Fort Macon and the surrounding property was the second area acquired by the state for the purpose of establishing a state parks system.

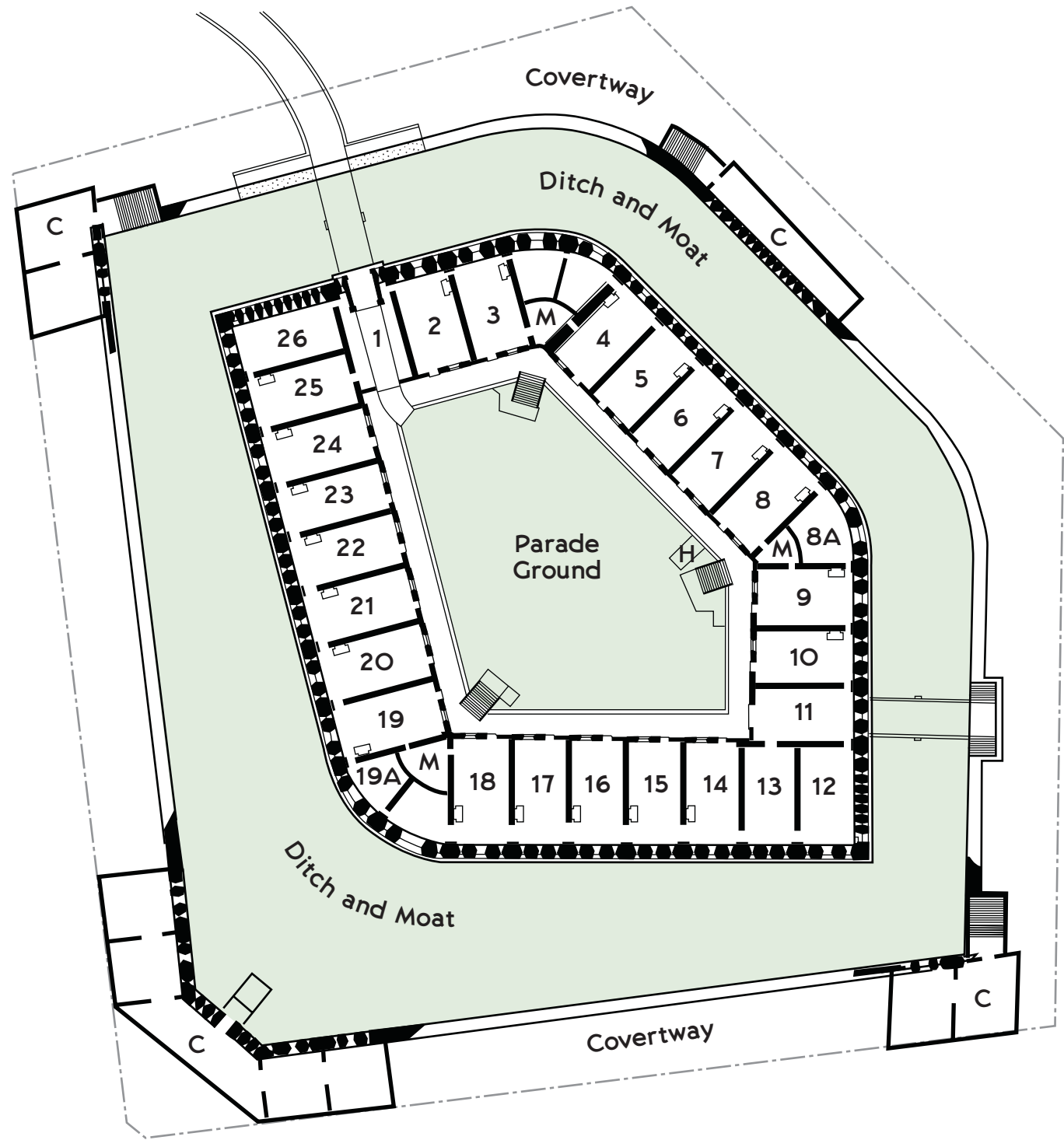
During 1934-35, the Civilian Conservation Corps restored the fort and established public recreational facilities, which enabled Fort Macon State Park to officially open May 1, 1936, as North Carolina's second state park.

At the outbreak of World War II, the U.S. Army leased the park from the state and actively manned the fort with the Coast Artillery Corps once again to protect a number of important nearby facilities. The fort was occupied from December 1941 to November 1944. On October 1, 1946, the Army returned the fort and the park to the state.

Today, Fort Macon is one of North Carolina's most visited state parks, welcoming more than 1 million visitors each year.

For detailed information about the history of Fort Macon, visit the Friends of Fort Macon Website at www.friendsoffortmacon.org or the park's website at ncparks.gov/fort-macon-state-park.

GUIDE TO FORT MACON



The main entrance to the **citadel** is known as the **sally port (1)** and is the primary entrance to Fort Macon. The three sets of original doors date from 1843-44. Directly ahead is the inner court known as the **parade ground**. On either side of the parade are vaulted rooms known as **casemates**.

To the left of the sally port are rooms that make up the restored section. These rooms appear as all the fort's casemates would have in the 1800s. The windows, doors, shutters, wooden floors and ornate trim have been restored exactly from copies of the fort's original plans. These rooms house restored soldier quarters and the Fort Macon Museum, with exhibits detailing different periods in the fort's history.

Casemate 2 was the fort's guardhouse until the Civil War. Thereafter, it was an office for the commandant or adjutant. **Casemate 3** has been used at different times as an office, officers' quarters and storage.

Gunpowder magazines (M) are located in the angles under the stairways. They were used to store gunpowder and are protected by extra thick walls, as well as by the stairways themselves. Under the stairs are underground cisterns for drinking water. The water is provided by natural rainwater that filters through the soil above the casemates, passes through zinc pipes in the walls between each casemate and flows through underground channels at the foot of the parade wall to reach the fort's cisterns.

Casemates 4-8 were usually used as officers' quarters and constituted what would military posts would call the "Officers' Row." At other times, **Casemate 4** was used as an officers' mess hall. **Casemate 6** was used in the early 1870s as the post library and school, where a private of the garrison taught the children of the families living on the post. **Casemates 4 and 5** have been restored to show examples of enlisted men's' and officers' quarters from the Civil War period.

The gunpowder magazine adjacent to **Casemate 8** has been restored inside to show all three of the fort's magazines as they would have originally appeared. Directly in front of the doorway of Casemate 8 is a restored **hot shot furnace (H)**, which was used to heat cannonballs until they were red hot. The cannonballs were used to set wooden warships on fire during an attack. **Casemate 8A** was used as a kitchen, a storeroom and as the commanding officer's office during World War II.

Casemate 9 was used for offices, soldiers' quarters during the Civil War and as a company mess room in the 1870s. **Casemate 10** was also used either for offices, soldiers' quarters or storage. Today, Casemate 10 is a restored World War II barracks.

Casemate 11 is the main postern, which was used to provide access to the gun emplacements of the main channel fronts via the bridge over the ditch. During the time the fort served as a prison (1865-76), the postern was also used as a prisoners' messroom.

A massive brick baking oven stood in the center of **Casemate 12** until the U.S. Army demolished it during the World War II occupation of the fort. A replica oven now stands in its place. **Casemate 13** was the main garrison kitchen.

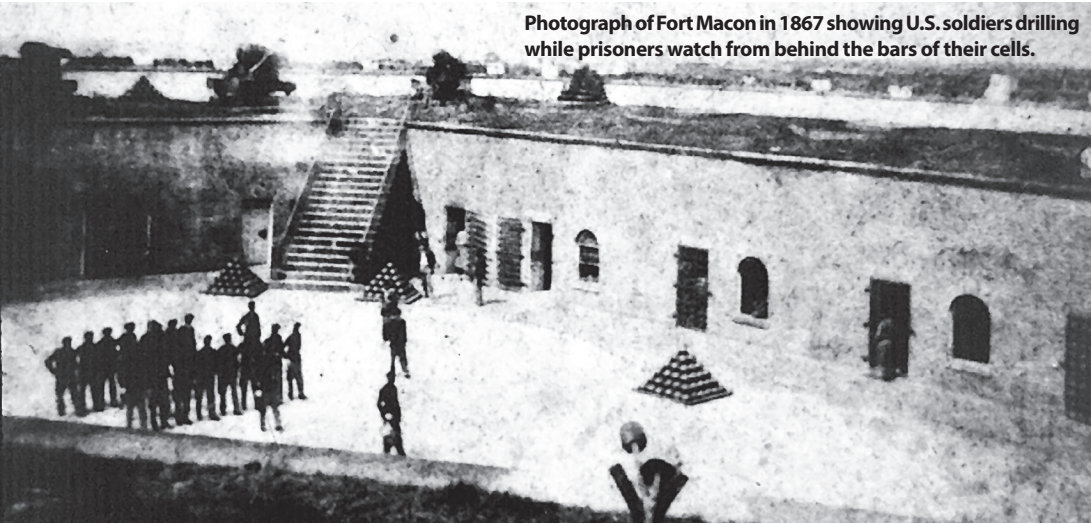
Casemates 14 through 18 have always been used as quarters for enlisted men. **Casemate 18** was also used as an ordnance storeroom for ammunition during the Civil War. The two small rooms behind the magazine were also used to store ammunition. One of them (**19A**) is a postern that provides access to the ditch and counterfire galleries under the covertway, or outer wall.

Casemates 19 through 24 have been used at different times as offices, storerooms, enlisted men's quarters and prison cells. When the fort was used as a prison, these rooms were fitted with iron bars and prison doors. Although intended to hold up to 200 inmates, the largest prison population at the fort was 120 men. The remaining rooms were used frequently for other purposes. **Casemate 23** was used as a kitchen and mess room during the Civil War and features a restored cooking range. **Casemate 24** is a restored commissary storeroom.

Casemate 25 was used for ordnance storage or commissary and quartermaster storage through the years of the Civil War. Afterward, the casemate was used as a guardroom. **Casemate 26** originally housed prisoners of war and was used after the Civil War for quartermaster or commissary storage. Both of these rooms currently house maintenance equipment and are closed to the public.

Surrounding Fort Macon's citadel is the sunken area known as the **ditch**, which was formerly deeper and could be turned into a **moat** by flooding it with sea water from a nearby canal. The moat posed an obstacle to an enemy assault. Across the ditch is the fort's outer wall of defense known as the **covertway**. Notice the rooms (C) under the covertway that look down the avenues of the ditch. These are **counterfire galleries** from which the fort's defenders could open fire with cannons and small arms to annihilate enemy attackers trapped in the ditch.

Tour the covertway or the top of the citadel, where most of the fort's original cannon emplacements still remain and from which excellent views of the ocean, inlet and surrounding area can be seen. Examples of original and replica cannons can be found at several locations in and around the fort. Guided tours of the fort are usually available during the spring, summer and fall. Check with the park office for information about special programs and events. Enjoy your visit to Fort Macon!



Photograph of Fort Macon in 1867 showing U.S. soldiers drilling while prisoners watch from behind the bars of their cells.

